No. 87

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Do—do you anticipate that I will be summoned as a witness, Robert?" she asked, eyeing her husband furtively.

R. of M. G., No. 37.

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ALICE greeted Cora with a condescending nod of her dark head as Cora entered her boudoir. The dark black eyes of Alice seemed to penetrate the very soul of this unhappy young girl. Cora remained standing. She was overawed and very much frightened.

"Won't you have a seat?" Alice said with a smile. "You may come nearer, Miss Allen. Sit right here."

Cora advanced timidly and took the proffered seat.

"Now tell me what can I do for you?" Alice asked. Her black eyes never left Cora Allen's face for a single moment.

"I came to see you in behalf of Larry Coleman," the young girl quivered. "You know that he is to be taken away to the penitentiary to-morrow. I — I am making a last effort to save his life. You were his friend, and I came to appeal to you for help."

Cora Allen had bent forward in her chair. Her tear-filled eyes rested upon the face of Alice with an eager and expectant look.

"He has been found guilty by twelve men, Miss Allen. I am afraid my voice and influence would count very little against them. I am very sorry for Larry Coleman and you. If I am not mistaken you were his betrothed."

Alice spoke rapidly, her voice pitched high. This interview with the unhappy young girl was not a very pleasant task for her.

Cora raised her hands in a mute appeal.

"It is in your power to save his life, Mrs Ames," she implored, "if you would but speak."

Alice's face turned deadly pale. What did this girl mean by her insinuation? Could it be possible that Larry Coleman had betrayed her to Cora?

"I do not understand you, Miss Allen," she said at last, her words coming with an effort. "Surely it is not in my power to save a man who is a condemned murderer."

"Ah, but you know that Larry is innocent," the girl cried eagerly. "Yes, you know it. You alone—and I."

Alice fought desperately to retain her self-control. For a moment she was too stunned to make an answer.

"You must speak plainly, Miss Allen," she at last replied with a visible effort. "You say Larry Coleman is innocent. You go a step further and declare that I know he is innocent.

"Your assertion is a daring one. Do you perhaps mean to insinuate that I was his accomplice in that miserable affair?"

The young girl shook her head vigorously. She met the dark eyes without fear.

"I have said you know that Larry is innocent. Well, I repeat it," she retorted deliberately. "Could you stand calmly by and see an innocent man go to his death? Would you accept such a sacrifice?

"No — no," she cried vehemently when Alice raised her hand, "you must hear me out. You are the only person under the sun who could save his life, because—because you yourself fired the shot that killed Earl Cortland."

Alice sprang to her feet. Her eyes flashed ominously. It looked for a moment as if she was about to fly at the throat of Cora Allen. A few minutes of intense silence ensued. She was gasping for breath and words.

"You — you do not know what you are saying, girl," she hissed. "I presume that you, too, have heard

of the silly accusation of Cortland on the scene of the shooting. What he said counts for nothing, since Larry Coleman confessed."

Cora Allen raised her eyes.

"But there is something else," she said quietly.

Alice came a step nearer. There was a malignant gleam in her eyes.

"You have been to see Coleman," she spoke slowly. "He has told you a story too silly to believe, in order to save his life. Well, it will avail him nothing. No one will believe it. It was he then who accused me. Yes, I can read it in your eyes."

The young girl shook her head.

"No, Mrs. Ames," Cora replied decisively. "You are doing him an injustice. I will tell you the truth of the matter. I have been to see Larry Coleman.

"I have pleaded with him on my knees to save himself; but my words fell upon deaf ears. He loves you madly and is willing to lose his life for you.

"No word against you has passed his lips. On the contrary, he insisted that he fired the shot, and swears that he alone is guilty."

Alice was walking up and down the room with her hands clenched behind her back. Suddenly she stopped directly in front of Cora Allen.

"Then why do you annoy me further with this affair?" she exclaimed. "If he himself proclaims his guilt, why do you doubt it?"

"Because Larry in his mad infatuation is not responsible for what he says," Cora answered evenly. "It is because of this mad love for you that he has accused himself and is willing to die for you."

"If he was foolish enough to allow himself to fall in love with me, a married woman, I knew nothing of it," Alice lied. "I never encouraged him by neither look

nor word."

Cora retreated before the ominous stare of Alice's black eyes; but she thought of Larry, the man she loved. She was fighting for his life, and that alone gave her new courage.

"You are not speaking the truth, Mrs. Ames," she retorted with spirit. "You did encourage him. You allowed him to approach you—you suffered him to kiss your hand, and listened to his mad declaration of love. I—I have seen it with my own eyes, heard his words with my own ears.

"Yes, I have," the girl went on fearlessly. "This happened the day before the hunt. It was quite by accident that I came upon you. I could not help but see your attitude and hear those words.

"You had some reason to fear Cortland, and you wanted him put out of your way. Larry Coleman refused to cowardly shoot the man down when his back was turned; but you rose to the emergency. Your hand was steady and your aim true."

Alice had regained her composure. She realized that she was dealing with a dangerous enemy.

"I—I presume that Larry told you this story," she said at length. "Well, even this proof could not save him."

"But I have other proof which you cannot refute," Cora Allen answered slowly. "I have a letter directed to you. I found it after Cortland had been carried away. I do not know why I failed to show it to my father or Mr. Ames, which I should have done.

"Listen, Mrs. Ames," she went on imploringly, "I am willing to destroy this letter, since it would incriminate you. No one shall know of its existence, if you will promise me to save Larry's life.

"You can do it. You could say that the gun was

in your hand and that it was discharged accidentally. Still better, you might say that you fired at a rabbit, or anything else you like. They would not doubt your word.

"This way you would go free, and Larry's life would be spared to me. I love him, Mrs. Ames; yes, I love him with all my heart and soul. To me he is everything, my very life. I know I can win back his love. Will —will you not do this?"

Cora Allen was groveling at the feet of Alice with her hands raised in mute supplication.

Mrs. Ames remained thoughtful for a few moments.

"You say—you have a letter?" she stammered at last.

"Yes, I found it after the shooting," Cora replied. "It lay in the snow. I presume it fell out of Mr. Cortland's pocket unobserved as he was being carried away. He must have carried it in his breastpocket, because it was soiled and red with blood.

"The dampness of the snow had loosened the mucilage and it lay open. As I stooped to pick it up, the letter fell from the envelope. When I glanced at it I discovered that it contained a horrible secret. It concerned you, Mrs. Ames——"

Cora Allen got no further.

Alice had risen from her seat. Her wild eyes seemed ready to leave their sockets. With a dexterous movement she put one hand over Cora's mouth.

"Not another word, I tell you!" she hissed into the young girl's ears.

Cora Allen started back. Her face had gone very pale. Alice's hands twitched nervously. It seemed they were eager to fasten themselves around Cora's white throat.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Allen," Mrs. Ames stammered at last. "I did not mean to harm you. I must confess I was a little upset by your story."

She sank back upon her seat with her eyes still watching the younger woman furtively.

"You — you say you found such a letter?" she went on, resuming a quiet persuasive tone. "I am sure there must be some mistake. That letter was not addressed to me."

"No, it was addressed to Mr. Ames," explained Cora.

Alice smiled with an effort. What did it mean? She had found one letter which contained some damning evidence against her, and she had destroyed it.

Of course, she argued with herself, it was quite possible that Cortland had written two such letters to make sure of her destruction in case one was lost. Alice arrived at this conclusion quickly.

The one thing to do now, was, to get that second letter from this girl.

"You did not show the letter to anyone, Miss Allen?" she asked at length.

Cora shook her head.

"The contents of this letter can be nothing but a web of malicious lies," Alice went on. "Cortland was my bitter enemy because I refused to accede to his wishes. He was desperately in love with me, and wanted me to elope with him.

"I was rather curious to know what those silly lies were he told about me in that letter. Would you mind showing it to me?"

Cora Allen hesitated for a moment, then with a quick movement she took the missive from her bosom and handed it to Mrs. Ames.

Alice's fingers closed greedily on the fatal letter.

She opened it slowly and began to read. Her face turned deadly white. It laid bare the innermost secret of her soul. She dared not think what would have happened had this letter reached her husband's hands.

At last Alice rose. She looked at her visitor with a curious expression in her eyes.

With a measuring tread she walked over to the open window, then deliberately began to tear the letter into a thousand shreds.

A sudden gust of wind came and swept them away out of the window.

Cora Allen sat there transfixed. She could scarcely believe her eyes.

She wanted to rise and prevent the destruction of the letter, but it seemed that she had lost the control of her limbs.

When at last she rose from her chair and tottered toward the window, only one or two small fragments of it were still visible. These, too were being carried away by the wind.

Suddenly she found the black eyes of Alice staring malignantly into her own, and a voice quivering with passion and hatred hissed into her ears:

"An imprudent word from your lips would cost your father his position. His daily bread and yours depend upon your absolute silence. Now go!"

Cora Allen was beaten. She staggered toward the door. Before her trembling hand reached the knob, however, she tottered and almost fell.

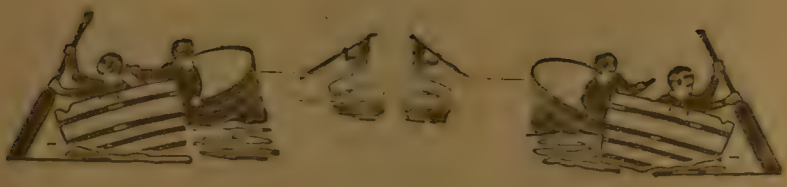
Summoning the last remnant of her fast waning strength, she pulled herself together and straightened up. Facing her dangerous enemy, she said with a pitiful quaver in her voice:

She started back with a low cry. There, before her, stood Robert Ames.

"You had no right to destroy that letter, Mrs. Ames. There is a just God above us who will punish you for that."

"Get out!" Alice's tone was menacing. "Get out or I'll——"

The poor girl did not wait to hear the sentence finished. Once more she reached for the doorknob. But just then the door was pushed open from without.



Chapter 290

ALICE'S TRICKERY

THE UNEXPECTED appearance of Robert Ames at this most critical stage of the game, almost threw Alice off her guard. It was with a frantic effort that she regained complete control of herself and her mental faculties.

There was not the least doubt in her mind but what her husband had overheard some of the conversation between herself and Cora Allen.

Since the unhappy girl had turned to go, she was ready to play her part before him.

One glance at his stern face warned Alice of impending danger. He advanced a few steps into the room and said in an even tone:

"What is the matter here, Alice? What has happened?"

"Thank God that you have come, Robert," she cried, feigning to be alarmed. "I was just about to ring for Jackson to save me from the attack of a demented person."

Cora Allen had turned swiftly and stood at the side of Robert Ames, who regarded her and his wife with a curious expression in his eyes.

"You — you surely don't mean to say that Cora here is the demented person you speak of?" he remarked coolly.

"Yes, it is she," Alice replied eagerly.

The young millionaire turned to Cora with a kindly smile upon his handsome face.

"What is it, Cora?"

"I want that letter which belongs to me," she answered promptly.

The face of Robert Ames was blank. His gaze fell questioningly upon his wife.

"I will explain this matter to you," Alice broke in before Cora Allen had an opportunity to state her side in the case. "This girl came to me to plead for her lover, Larry Coleman.

"According to her foolish assertion I am the murderer of Earl Cortland, because she claims that the wounded man had accused me directly after the shooting occurred.

"She says further that this Coleman had assumed the blame for the crime because of his infatuation with me. She also claims to have found a letter which had been written by Cortland and addressed to you.

"According to her statement this letter contained the most frightful accusations against me. Then she threatened to show this letter to you unless I consented to assume the guilt of the crime and thus free her lover —Larry Coleman."

Robert Ames remained speechless.

These words spoken by his wife in an unnatural tone, fell like a sickening thud upon his ears.

His scrutinizing gaze rested upon Cora Allen's face.

He knew that she had been the sweetheart of Larry Coleman, and also that the frightful tragedy had almost dethroned the reason of this unfortunate young girl, because her lover was the murderer and was condemned to die.

He thought he detected a peculiar gleam in the eyes of Cora, which caused him to jump to the conclusion that perhaps the mind of this unhappy bride of Coleman had been unbalanced.

"It is true what she has said," Cora's voice spoke rationally enough. "I came to plead for the life of the man whom I love more than my own life; but she would not listen to me, and the only evidence I had she destroyed. I must have back that letter."

"What has become of the letter, Miss Allen speaks of?" he asked sternly.

"Why, this girl is insane," Alice retorted angrily. "She did not bring any letter, and consequently I did not see it."

"Yes, you saw it," Cora broke in excitedly. "You took it from my hands and then tore it to shreds, and threw it out of the window. "Look, Mr. Ames," she cried, drawing him toward the window, "the wind has carried most of the fragments away; but there are still a few small pieces lying below."

Again the eyes of Robert Ames rested upon the flushed face of his wife.

Its expression had little in it to reassure him, and he felt more inclined than ever before to believe the words of Cora Allen.

"I shall order Jackson to pick up those small fragments and piece them together," he said icily, "perhaps that would be the only way to learn the truth of this affair."

"You might spare yourself that trouble," Alice announced suddenly in a changed tone. "I am quite willing to admit that this girl brought a letter and also that I destroyed it.

"But come with me, Robert," she continued, turning to her husband, "I have a confession to make which will astound you and also serve to allow Larry Coleman to regain his liberty."

Then she faced Cora Allen with a winning smile, and said:

"You will suffer us to leave you alone for a few minutes, Cora, will you not? My husband and I will talk this matter over, and I promise you that Larry Coleman shall be freed at once."

The young girl cried tears of happiness at this unexpected turn of affairs.

At last her lover would be given an opportunity to vindicate himself against his will.

She knew positively that Mrs. Ames had fired the shot which killed Cortland, and that her word would set him free.

Robert Ames looked aghast at his wife as she beckoned him to follow her. A frightful suspicion took possession of him.

Had she after all a confession to make?

The instant the door closed behind them, the face and entire attitude of Alice underwent a lightning change.

Her head which had been bowed in contrition and guilt was again raised proud and defiant.

"What do you think of her case, Robert?" she said in a matter of fact way. "Isn't it pitiful? I really believe that this poor girl has lost her reason completely."

Robert Ames breathed an intense sigh of relief.

He understood immediately that his wife had only been acting in order to humor this unfortunate creature.

"Don't you think her father ought to be informed of her condition?" Alice continued when her husband failed to make a reply.

"Yes, by all means," he replied rather vehemently. "If this girl is really insane she must not be allowed to run at large and repeat this preposterous story. It would be sure to reach the ears of the gossips, and you

know what that means."

Alice smiled bitterly.

"I think it would be the best plan to send her at once to some private sanitarium," she suggested. "It would be well for you to talk this matter over with her father.

"Perhaps he could be prevailed upon to allow us to take care of this unhappy child. I should be very glad to defray the expense."

"That is a splendid idea, Alice," Robert answered readily. "I will send Jackson over and ask her father to come to the villa."

This was not necessary, for when Robert opened the door to call his valet, he found him already waiting with the news that Gamekeeper Allen was in the hall below to see him.

Without losing a moment's time the young millionaire hurried down into the reception hall.

He greeted Allen with a pleasant smile and drew him into the library.

It developed that the old man had come in search of his daughter, and in the course of conversation, explained that he feared that Cora was losing her mind.

He told of a number of her queer antics, which had led him to suspect the worst.

The tears were streaming down the honest face of the old gamekeeper as he spoke, whose heart bled for his only child.

His heart swelled with gratitude when Robert Ames offered to have the girl sent to a private sanitarium at his expense.

He consented eagerly and suggested that she be taken away at once, while her mental disease was in its early stages.

Then Alice was called into the conference. And

once more she did a shrewd piece of acting.

For quite a while they talked to the father of Cora, and he nodded his head several times. Not for a moment did he suspect the foul plot involving his only child.

He was an honest man—a trustful man, who believed all others were like him.

Chapter 291

CORA'S FATE

GAMEKEEPER ALLEN had been carefully instructed by Alice to humor his daughter. This, she argued, would be the least troublesome way to induce her to accompany them to the private sanitarium.

Robert Ames had withdrawn from the room and he left the matter entirely in the hands of his wife and Cora Allen's father.

Between these two it was agreed to induce the unhappy young girl to follow them, by making her believe that they intended to take her to the prison where Larry Coleman was confined.

Alice told him also to humor her in the belief that Mrs. Ames had made a full confession and that she herself would do all in her power to have Coleman released immediately.

Poor, unsuspecting Cora Allen waited patiently for the return of Mr. and Mrs. Ames.

She was rather surprised when she saw her father enter the room with them, and rose quickly from her chair to greet him.

"Mrs. Ames has told me everything," the old man said, fighting hard to keep back the tears.

"It is her desire to make a full statement to the district attorney. Larry will be set free at once."

"Oh, thank God," the young girl cried fervently. Then turning her tear-stained face to Alice, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Mrs. Ames."

She was the happiest woman in all the world at

this moment.

She could scarcely believe her own ears as she listened to the words of her father. Surely he would not lie to her.

Cora felt still more convinced when her father told her that they were to make the trip to the district attorney's office at once, and that Mrs. Ames was to accompany them.

The automobile stood waiting at the door.

Cora was tenderly lifted into the car by her father. Alice took a seat beside her and made every effort to engage her in a conversation.

From time to time the approving glance of Cora's father rested upon her face.

They were whirled away an instant later.

Little did this unfortunate young girl dream that she was being taken to a living tomb, and that this very pleasant faced woman at her side was her worst enemy.

Cora was under the impression that they were to go directly to the city jail.

She looked rather surprised when the automobile came to a stop in front of a building which in no way resembled a prison.

She looked questioningly at her father who intercepted her eager glance.

"This is the district attorney's office," he assured her. "Mrs. Ames will acquaint him with all the facts pertaining to the case, and he must sign the order for Larry Coleman's release."

Cora Allen was apparently satisfied with that explanation. The fact was, however, that this was the residence of a well known physician and specialist on mental diseases, whom Alice happened to know very well.

They entered the house quickly. Gamekeeper Allen and his daughter were left alone in one room, while Alice had an interview with the physician.

A few minutes later the specialist entered the room with Mrs. Ames and asked a number of questions concerning Larry Coleman.

He seemed to be desirous of ascertaining the mental condition of Cora Allen.

The young girl answered these questions in an indistinct and haltering fashion. She was visibly confused.

Finally the physician exchanged an understanding glance with Alice and left the room.

Cora Allen was under the impression that this man was the district attorney, when in fact he was the man by whose orders she was to be admitted to an asylum for the insane.

She became further convinced when her father told her that he would have to leave the room and be a witness to Mrs Ames' confession.

A few minutes later he returned with Alice who held a sealed envelope in her hand. This, according to her statement, contained the recommendation for Larry Coleman's immediate release.

Cora Allen never suspected that this heartless fiend had been successful in inducing the physician to sign the commitment papers.

It was with this document that Alice was going to rid herself of the hapless young girl who had come in possession of her life's secret.

A hurried trip to the prison was to be made next. Cora smiled in happy anticipation. She was to witness the liberation of her own lover, Larry Coleman.

At last the automobile stopped in front of a gloomy looking building. It had the outward appear-

ance of a prison.

Cora gazed at the heavily barred windows and sighed. Her lover was languishing behind those walls and she was to see him in a few minutes.

She jumped from the automobile and followed her father and Alice eagerly.

The director of this institution had already been informed of the coming of a new patient, who was a protege of the wealthy and influential Mrs. Ames.

He received the visitors in the waiting room. During a few minutes of whispered conversation the director scrutinized Cora Allen's face covertly.

He seemed to have discovered something in the wild look of her eyes, which led him to form a hasty conclusion.

"The poor girl," he murmured. "I am afraid there is not much hope for her. An ailment of this kind resulting from an unhappy love affair is usually incurable."

He nodded his head several times, while Alice made him acquainted with certain facts.

Then he stepped to the door and called one of his attendants.

Cora Allen was seated close to her father, and she was holding his hand lovingly.

The old man could hardly keep back the tears which constantly welled up in his eyes. His old gray head was bowed in hopeless despair.

In spite of all his mental suffering he was obliged to meet the eager gaze of his unfortunate child with a reassuring smile.

His heart was near the breaking point when his only child rose in answer to the call of Alice. It meant that she was going away from him, perhaps forever.

An attendant had entered. The director whis-

pered a few words to him, then turned to Cora and said with a smile:

"This man will take you to Larry Coleman. You may follow him without fear."

The unsuspecting girl flashed her father another happy smile and followed the attendant willingly.

Alice could scarcely repress a shout of triumph when the door closed behind Cora Allen. Through her devilish machinations she had succeeded in rendering this innocent young girl harmless.

She would have nothing more to fear from that source. Even if Cora was later released from the institution, who would believe the words of a person who had been an inmate of an insane asylum?

Chapter 232

RUSSEL SHERWOOD

AT LAST Alice felt perfectly at ease. No longer did danger threaten her. George Ballard, or Earl Cortland, as he had chosen to call himself, was dead and buried. Larry Coleman languished in prison, waiting for the fatal day. It was generally accepted as a positive fact that this hapless and very foolish young man would die in the electric chair.

That would remove him forever. Cora Allen was an inmate of the insane asylum. With these two out of the way, Mrs. Ames believed she had nothing more to fear.

Viewing all these facts, Alice seemed to have cause for feeling at ease. So far as her conscience was concerned, it did not bother her in the least.

According to her selfish way of thinking, no man or woman had a right to stand in the way of the happiness she sought.

Robert Ames appeared to have succumbed to his lovely wife's charms at last. Not that he loved her devotely. She had simply succeeded in awakening the man in him. He craved her presence as a flower does the warming sun.

And young Ames was proud of his wife because she created admiration wherever she went. It pleased him to see other men stare at her with ill-concealed desire in their eyes.

Physically and intellectually, Alice made just the right kind of a mistress for his palatial home. She was

the kind of a woman he needed to further his social ambitions.

But while Alice quickly made friends with the men she met, the women obviously disapproved of her. Was it possible that these women had looked below the surface and discovered the flaw in her character?

Society life in Philadelphia had become somewhat irksome to Alice. At least this is what she told her husband.

The fact of the matter was that she dreaded the occasional meetings with Allen, the old groundkeeper. They seemed to shriek their accusation at her.

And Alice had another reason for wanting to take a trip somewhere. Larry Coleman's execution was to take place within three weeks. She looked forward to that day with a feeling of dread.

She broached the subject of going away for a while to Robert one morning as they were seated at the breakfast table.

"Well, where would you like to go?" he inquired with a smile.

"Either to California or to Florida, dear," she told him.

"Of the two I like Louisana best," Ames said laughing. "I would like to go to New Orleans."

Alice looked at him quickly.

"Why New Orleans?" she queried.

"Because the racing season is in full swing there," he retorted. "I am a lover of the sport. Had my horses been in a little better shape, I would have entered them. But it does not matter a great deal."

She thought for some time, then finally burst out:

"Alright, dear. Let's go to New Orleans. Can we start to-morrow?"

"I—I suppose we could, you impetuous girl," re-

plied her husband. "I'll run down to the bank this morning and make the necessary arrangements. And while I am at it, I might just as well get reservations for both of us on the Southern Special."

Alice did not make an attempt to conceal her joy. She clapped her hands like a delighted child and ran over to Robert and kissed him.

"Ah, you are the best husband in all the world," she purred.

If she expected him to say that she was the best wife in the world, she was doomed to disappointment. Instead Ames consulted his watch, then disengaged himself from her embrace.

"I have some old friends in New Orleans," he declared as he rose. "You heard me speak of Russel Sherwood, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," Alice nodded. "An old man, isn't he?"

"Not exactly that," came back. "Although Russel Sherwood has a grown son, he is far from being an old man. I should say he was just in the prime of life."

"Whatever that means," giggled Alice.

Robert Ames made no retort to this. He kissed his wife lightly on the cheek, then left for the bank. That night when her husband returned home, all the arrangements for the trip to New Orleans had been made.

They discussed a few details before they retired and Alice slept far better than a woman with murder on her soul deserved to sleep.

The following morning the Southern Special had Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ames abroad. Upon arriving at New Orleans, an unexpected surprise awaited them at the station.

An elderly but still unusually handsome man was at the station just as Ames and his wife alighted.

"Hello Bob Ames!" he cried, reaching for the Philadelphian's hand. "This is a pleasant surprise indeed. By jove, you don't know how glad I am to see you again."

"I am glad to see you, Mr Sherwood," exclaimed Robert. "I want to introduce you to my wife."

The introduction did not take long, but Alice felt instantly a peculiar dislike for Russel Sherwood He had a pair of keen, penetrating eyes which seemed to look right through her.

"As a picker of wives you deserve the blue ribbon, Bob," Mr. Sherwood grinned as he scrutinized the tall woman before him. "Well, Mrs Ames, I am sure delighted to know you Allow me to present my son."

At a motion an extremely handsome youth who had remained in the back ground, stepped forward.

"This is my boy, Russel, junior," Sherwood said not without a certain degree of pride. "Meet Mrs. Ames, Russel. You remember Mr. Ames, don't you?"

The young man blushed as he stammered a few words.

"You look more like brothers," Alice remarked while her eyes traveled from Sherwood's face to that of the younger man.

"We have been told that a number of times," Sherwood replied readily. "It is rather a flattering statement. It means that in spite of my advanced age, I have still preserved an outward youthful appearance."

"I presume we shall have the pleasure then of meeting Mrs. Sherwood during the racing season here in New Orleans," Alice ventured.

"She would like to have come with us, but she preferred to remain at home and look after the comfort of our younger son who is a high school student," Sherwood declared

Alice's keen eyes rested upon the face of the younger Sherwood.

She experienced a pleasant sensation when the young man met her ardent glance for an instant.

He became visibly embarrassed, however, and his handsome face flushed.

They parted a moment later, agreeing to meet at the race course during the afternoon.

Robert Ames and Alice took a suite of rooms at one of the best hotels in the city.

It was almost two o'clock after they had finished their meal and a hurried start was made for the race course.

Russel Sherwood and his son were awaiting them at the entrance.

As they pressed through the gate they noticed a commotion in front of the betting shed. A number of people were rushing excitedly toward the stables.

It developed that a young jockey had been thrown from his horse and was seriously injured.

The fractious animal was a favorite in the betting; but the owner seemed to be inclined to withdraw the horse from the race.

Unfortunately the younger Sherwood had placed a round sum of money on this horse and he showed his displeasure by entering into a heated argument with the owner of the animal.

"This horse is a sure winner and I think it is extremely unfair to withdraw it at this stage of the game," he cried excitedly.

"I refuse to have my jockey killed by riding this wild beast," the owner replied stubbornly. "If you think you can ride him, I would be glad to see you make the attempt."

To the surprise of those present, the young man

advanced swiftly, and before any one guessed his intention he had swung himself into the saddle.

The horse reared and plunged for a few moments then shot ahead like an arrow.

It was a mighty struggle for supremacy between man and beast; but it became more and more evident that young Sherwood would be the victor.

When he brought the animal back to its owner, he was greeted with a burst of applause from the many spectators.

"The horse is as docile as a lamb now," he said with a slightly trembling voice, "a child could ride it without fear."

So the horse was entered into the race with the result that it won by several lengths. Young Russel Sherwood was in a happy frame of mind when he left his father's side to cash his ticket.

Alice had been a most interested spectator of all that had happened.

There was something in the agile movements of this young man which she admired.

The compelling look in his eyes and the masterly style of handling that wild animal won her hearty plaudits.

When he returned after having cashed his bet, she congratulated him warmly.

Her blood surged to her face in a hot wave as he held her hand a trifle longer than was necessary.

Robert Ames was rather disappointed when Alice accepted the invitation of the elder Sherwood to spend the evening together with apparent eagerness.

He could not understand what had changed her mind so suddenly.

At the first meeting with the Sherwoods she had frowned upon the prospect of passing any length of time

in their company.

He little dreamed that Alice had conceived a sudden liking for the handsome young Russel Sherwood.

He was unaware of the fiery glances which had been exchanged behind his back that afternoon.

Robert would rather have spent the evening alone with his wife; but since Alice had seen fit to accept the invitation of Sherwood, he could not decline.

Russel Sherwood had secured a box at the opera, which seemed to please Alice immensely.

She looked radiantly beautiful as she sat there in the midst of the three gentlemen in evening dress.

Her costly gown was cut low at the neck, which allowed her marvelous white shoulders to gleam in the brilliant light.

She was well aware that she was the cynosure of all eyes, and a triumphant smile played constantly around the corners of her delicate mouth.

After the opera they visited one of the swell restaurants. Robert Ames had never seen his wife look more lovely nor in better spirits.

She drank considerable wine, which dyed her cheeks crimson.

Most of her witty remarks were addressed to the older Sherwood. The young man listened silently with a disappointed look in his dark eyes.

His treatment at the hands of Alice served to dampen the wild hope which had risen in his breast during the afternoon.

It was not until the clock struck the hour of midnight that they rose to depart.

Robert Ames had conquered his gloomy feeling during the evening, and when he arrived at the hotel with Alice, he laughed gayly at some flippant remark made by his wife.

But his laugh was not without a certain degree of restraint.

Occasionally, when his eyes rested upon his lovely wife, something like suspicion came into them. He looked very much like a husband who does not quite trust the woman he married.

Chapter 293

RUSSEL DECLARES HIMSELF

ROBERT AMES was anxious to return to Philadelphia, but he had listened to Alice's persuasive voice and lingered on. There had been a complete change in their relations which had puzzled him quite a bit.

First his wife had been glad to listen to his counsul and done everything in her power to please him.

Since their coming to New Orleans, Alice had begun to show him the other side of her disposition.

She had suddenly grown willful and capricious. He did not mean to be dictatorial or force her to anything against her will.

Since the racing season had come to a close, he could not see any good reason for her wanting to remain at New Orleans for a time.

It was true, she had found a very congenial companion in young Russel Sherwood, and it seemed that society in that city had lionized her to some extent.

In his anxiety to return to his business, he had been perhaps a trifle harsh in his insistence upon leaving New Orleans.

Alice had on this occasion asserted deliberately that she was not ready to go back to Philadelphia.

Their discussing of this subject had come dangerously close to an open quarrel.

Alice had lifted her mask for a moment, and Robert Ames got the first glimpse of her real disposition and true character.

The stand she had taken in this matter was an

extremely unreasonable and selfish one.

When Robert had at last given in to avoid a quarrel, she fell on his neck and covered his face with her hot, passionate kisses. So they remained at New Orleans.

It was very distasteful to him that his wife insisted upon spending a great deael of her time in the company of the Sherwoods.

With mild surprise he watched her every morning as she mounted her horse and took a canter through the suburbs of the city with young Russel.

He felt hurt that she did not ask him to accompany them. The elder Sherwood had also been excluded from participating in these little trips.

He declared, however, that he cared very little for horse-back riding, and kept Robert's company.

The fact that young Russel Sherwood had fallen desperately in love with his beautiful wife was unknown to Robert Ames.

If the elder Sherwood had an inkling of it, he failed to show it.

One day Alice and Russel had been invited to participate in a game of tennis.

Robert was passionately fond of the game; but his wife did not seem particularly anxious that he accompany her.

The handsome young man came immediately after lunch to get Alice. Robert stood at the window and watched his wife take a taxi with Russel Sherwood, to be driven to the tennis court.

Slowly Robert's patience was nearing its end. He would show his authority and insist that they return to Philadelphia the following day.

In the course of the afternoon he received a letter from the secretary of his bank. He read it carefully while a smile of approval crossed his face.

After some minutes of serious reflection he took his hat and cane and left the hotel.

He met the elder Sherwood on the way who seemed to be in a splendid humor.

"Where are you going, Robert?" he cried as they shook hands.

"I am going for a walk," was the casual reply.

"If you have no objections I will go with you," the other retorted eagerly.

"Not in the least. Come along."

They started off at a lively pace, and soon were engaged in an animated conversation.

Alice and young Russel Sherwood had reached the tennis court in the meantime.

The young man had yearned for an opportunity to be alone with this irresistible woman, who held his heart in the palm of her slim white hand.

In vain he tried to induce Alice to take a walk with him through the near-by woods; but she stubbornly refused. He showed his bitter disappointment plainly, for he played an indifferent game of tennis.

At last the time came for them to return to the hotel. His last chance had gone glimmering. To his intense surprise and pleasure, however, Alice invited him to have some refreshments with her.

He followed her eagerly to her suite of rooms. It seemed that her manner had changed suddenly.

Her dark eyes smiled encouragingly into his, and his hopes soared to the skies.

They were seated in the cozy sitting-room chatting pleasantly. Alice was a most charming hostess, and it was with a mighty effort that the enamored young man held himself under control.

"We shall leave soon for Philadelphia," Alice said.

Continued in next number

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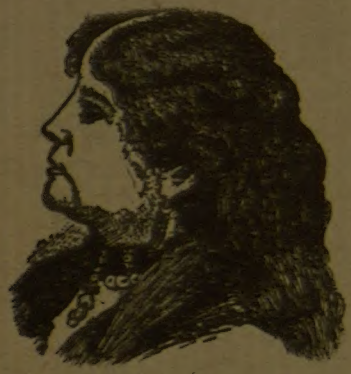

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